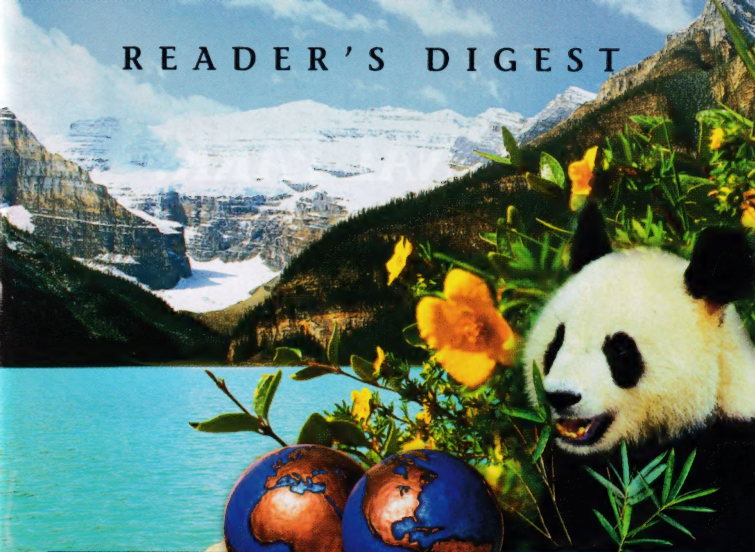
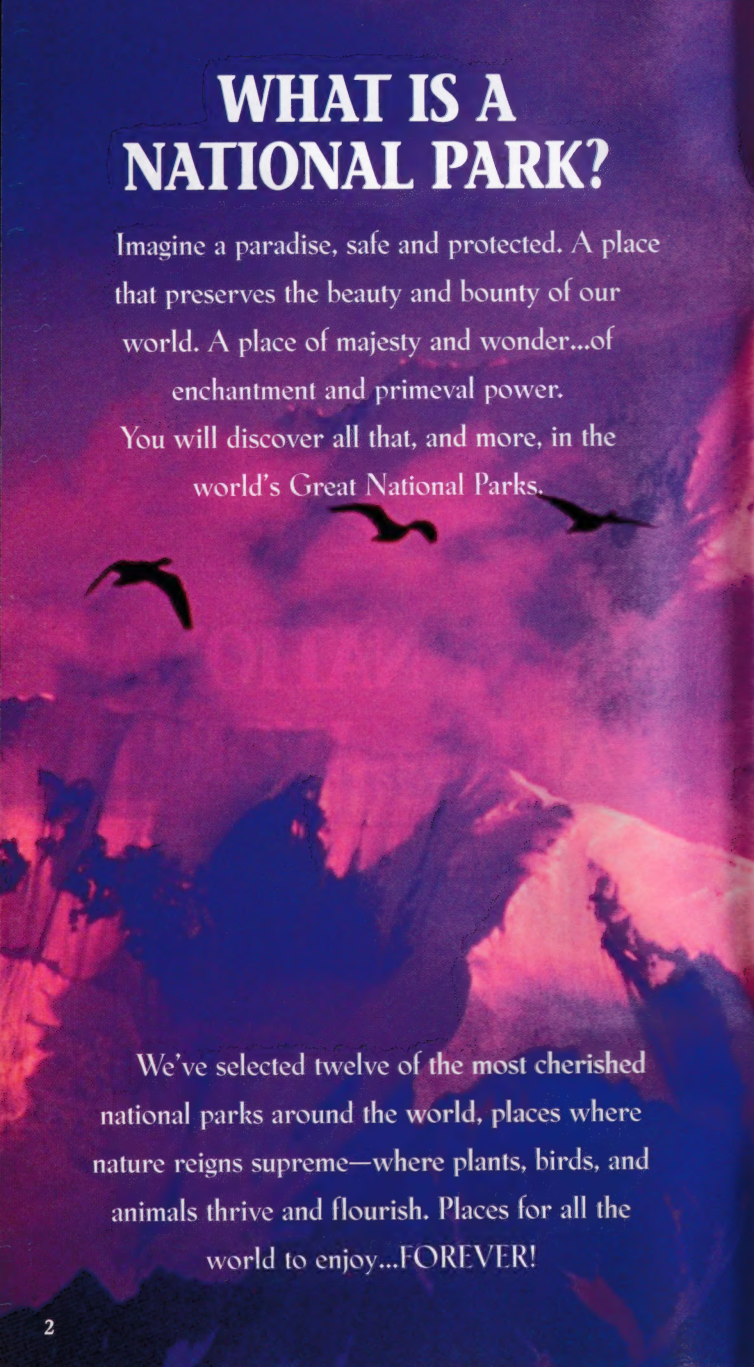
READER'S DIGEST



GREAT NATIONAL PARKS of the WORLD

WHAT IS A NATIONAL PARK?

Imagine a paradise, safe and protected. A place that preserves the beauty and bounty of our world. A place of majesty and wonder...of enchantment and primeval power.
You will discover all that, and more, in the world's Great National Parks.



We've selected twelve of the most cherished national parks around the world, places where nature reigns supreme—where plants, birds, and animals thrive and flourish. Places for all the world to enjoy...FOREVER!

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GLACIER BAY
Alaska

A magnificent wilderness of secret coves and glistening ice fields rimmed by lofty peaks.

Huge icebergs often float by, making an eerie symphony of drips, crackles and pops.

Two hundred years ago, Alaska's Glacier Bay was buried under a sheet of ice. Today, this breathtaking maritime park features the largest concentration of tidewater glaciers in the world—twenty magnificent ice and rock rivers streaming to the sea.

Glacier Bay is also home to an astonishing array of plant and marine life. Humpback whales breach shimmering waters while Dall sheep, black bears, moose, wolves, and coyote prowl the inland territories. Eagles soar overhead, and every new vista brings a glimpse of nature at its grandest and most glorious.

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? Stretching Northward from Alaska's Inside Passage.
WHAT? A glacier-crowned maritime wilderness stretching over 1.2 million hectares.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? It supports over 200 species of fish, 220 species of bird, and scores of rare mammals.

The pristine forests of Corcovado protect the largest colony of scarlet macaws in the world.

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? On the West coast of Costa Rica in South America.
WHAT? 500 square kilometres of lush, tropical forest.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? Dozens of endangered species find a safe refuge here and the park comprises over eight different eco-systems!

When Christopher Columbus landed in Central America in 1502, he named his discovery "Costa Rica" or rich coast, because he thought the land was filled with precious metals.

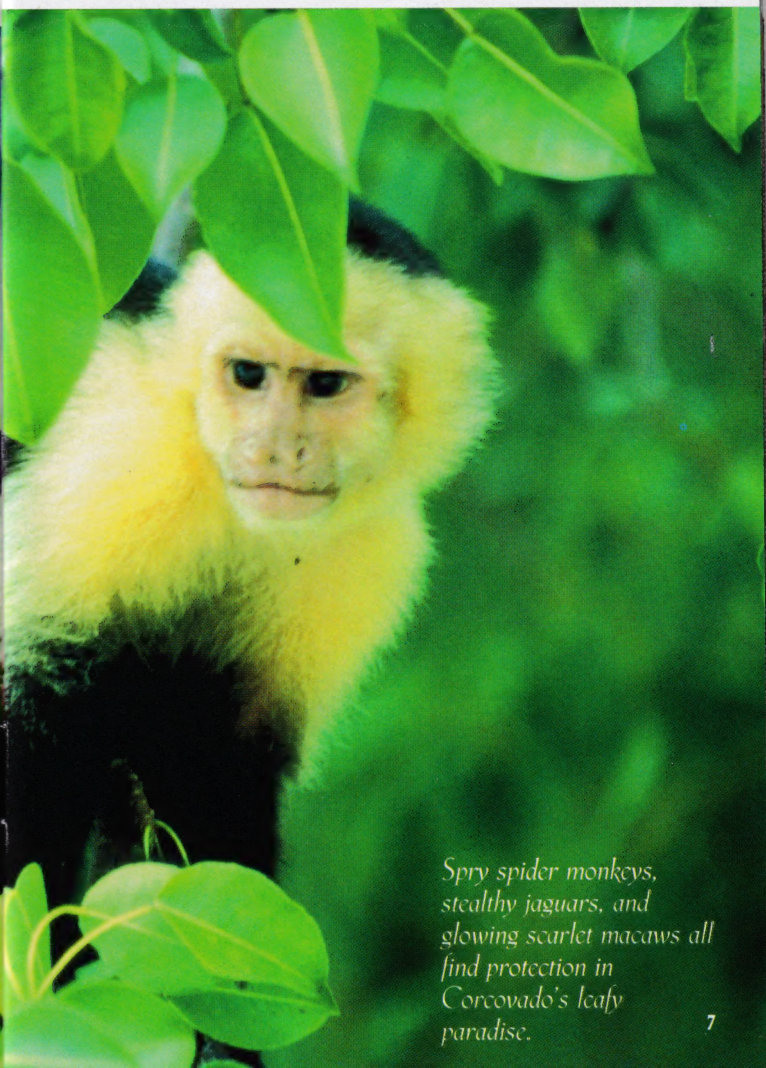
While the earth never yielded gold or silver, it held a wealth of natural beauty, and much of that beauty can be found at Corcovado National Park.

This treasure trove of tropical flora and fauna is home for most of the country's endangered species, including jaguars, tapirs, poison dart frogs and crocodiles.

There are over 400 different species of birds, 6,000 insects and 500 kinds of trees. Most remarkable of all is the huge colony of scarlet macaws which add a bolt of bright colour to the emerald forests.

CORCOVADO
Costa Rica

The crown jewel of Costa Rica's National Park system is a verdant wonderland throbbing with an abundance of exotic creatures.



Spry spider monkeys, stealthy jaguars, and glowing scarlet macaws all find protection in Corcovado's leafy paradise.

BANFF
Canada

Stunning sulfur springs meet cool glacial waters in this splendid, soaring wilderness.

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? In Southwestern Canada, 2 hours west of Calgary.
WHAT? Over 6,500 square kilometres of the world's most spectacular mountain scenery.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? Canada's first National Park has glaciers, ice fields, raging rivers, and glowing lakes.

In Canada, the towering peaks of North America's most majestic mountain range, the Rockies, have carved out a special place all their own: Banff National Park. It is a place where the icy glaciers meet subterranean hot springs. One of the most popular spots is Lake Moraine, known for its glowing turquoise waters which are caused by the silty run-off from nearby glaciers. There are flower-filled pastures at Sunshine Meadows and knife-like rock formations along the Icefields Parkway. And at every turn, one's breath is taken away by the glorious beauty of Banff.

Bald Eagles find refuge in the lofty branches of Banff's woodlands.

One of the most breathtaking places on Earth, carved by water and shaped by time.

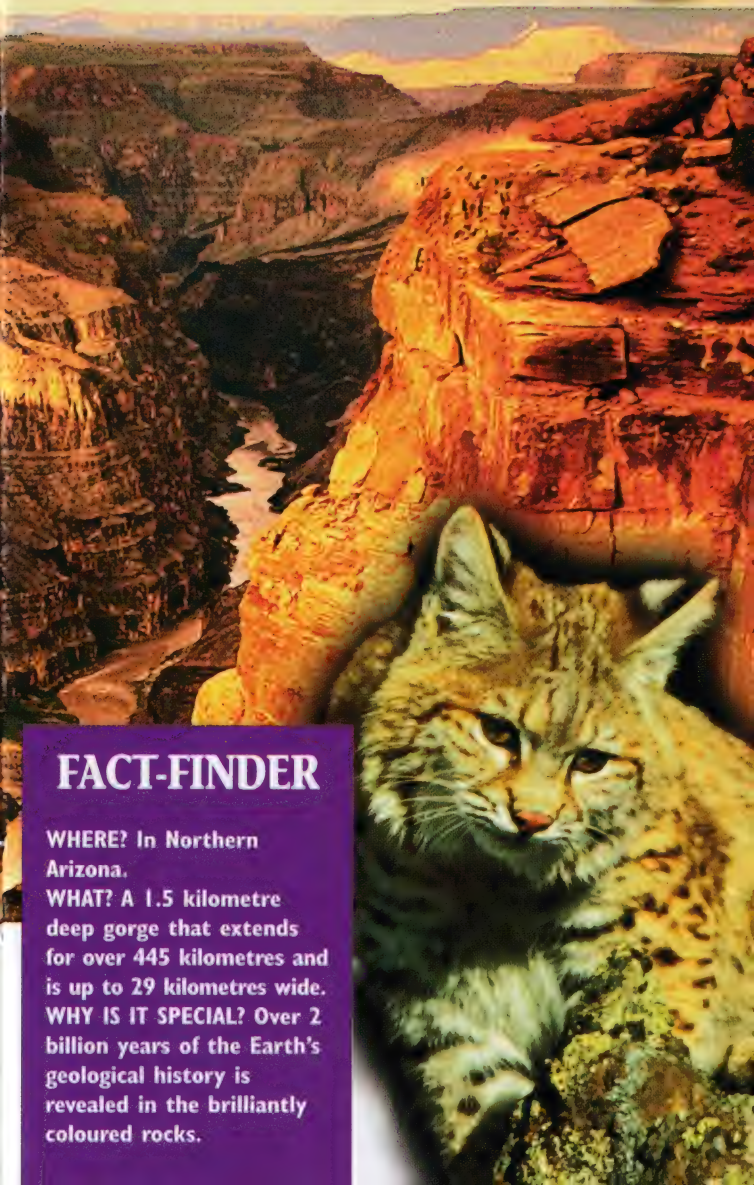
Four thousand years ago, the first groups of Native Americans wandered into the Grand Canyon—marvelling at its beauty much as we do today. For within its walls lies a vibrant two-billion year-old record of the history of our planet. Formed by ancient rocks that have weathered centuries of erosion, the Canyon is one of our planet's most amazing sights... a magnificent stone wonder shaped and preserved by the raging tides of the 2,350 kilometre-long Colourado River.

DID YOU KNOW
The canyon's pink rattlesnakes can be found nowhere else on Earth.

Bobcats, bighorn sheep, mule deer, rare Kaibob squirrel's, and coyotes are just a few of the creatures who manage to survive in this often times harsh, yet always magnificent landscape.

Over 1.5 kilometres deep, and stretching for almost 480 kilometres—the Canyon astounds all who see it.

GRAND CANYON
Arizona



FACT-FINDER

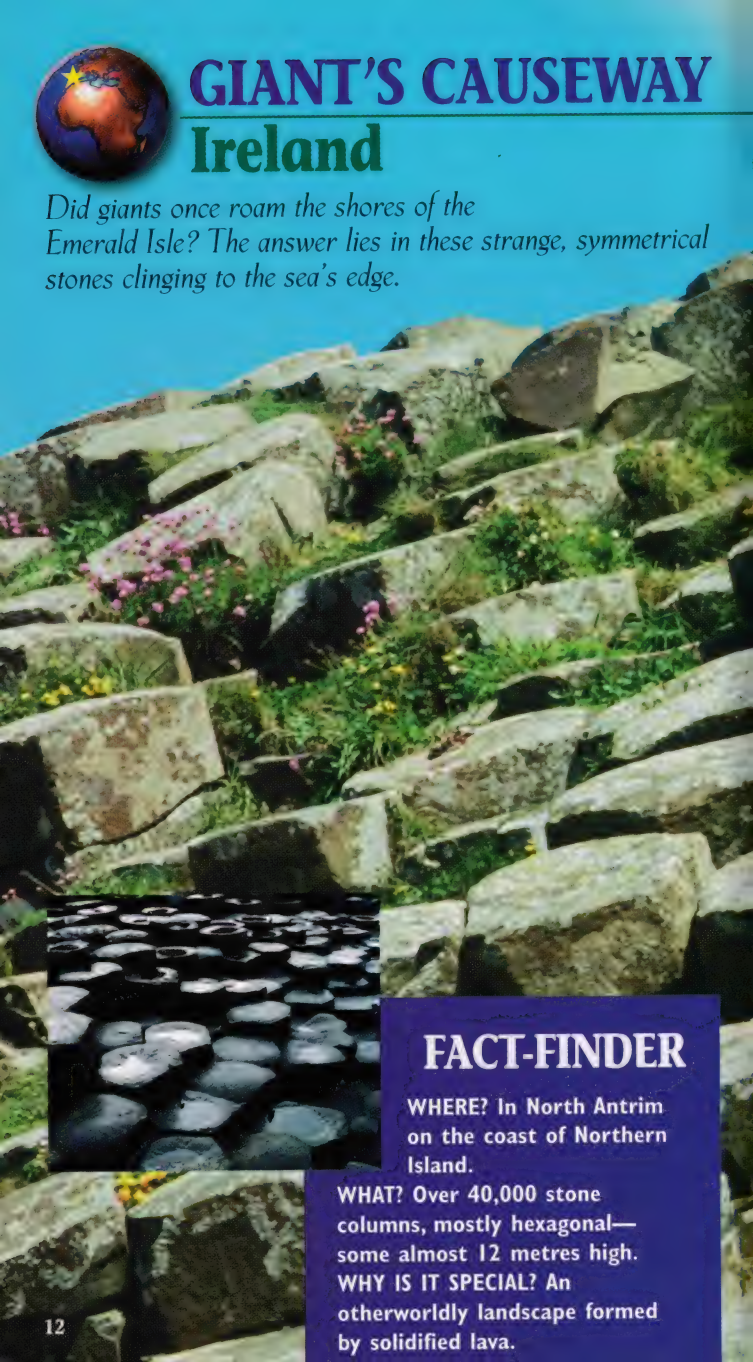
WHERE? In Northern Arizona.

WHAT? A 1.5 kilometre deep gorge that extends for over 445 kilometres and is up to 29 kilometres wide.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL? Over 2 billion years of the Earth's geological history is revealed in the brilliantly coloured rocks.

GIANT'S CAUSEWAY
Ireland

Did giants once roam the shores of the Emerald Isle? The answer lies in these strange, symmetrical stones clinging to the sea's edge.



FACT-FINDER

WHERE? In North Antrim on the coast of Northern Island.

WHAT? Over 40,000 stone columns, mostly hexagonal—some almost 12 metres high.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL? An otherworldly landscape formed by solidified lava.

North Antrim is a peaceful place—a place where wild ponies frolic in glorious green meadows, and the clean scent of salt air fills the breeze. And at the water's edge you will come upon a strange sight—over 40,000 basalt columns—some almost 12 metres tall, most hexagonal in shape. How did they come to be?

Scientists say this odd landscape was formed by volcanic eruptions and cooling lava, a natural rock formation unlike any other on Earth. But according to the ancients, the Giant's Causeway is the work of a legendary giant named Finn McCool, who could fling clods of dirt, the size of an entire island, at his enemies. Gazing upon this magical landscape, it's easy to believe the legend!

Don't look down! The Carrick-a-rede rope bridge is 24 metres above the craggy rocks!

GRAN PARADISO
Italy

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? In the Italian Alps, between Piemonte and Valle D'Aosta.

WHAT? A beautiful Alpine wonderland, dominated by meadows and towering mountain peaks.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL? Home to the rare ibex.

Italy's premier national park may just be this country's best kept secret.

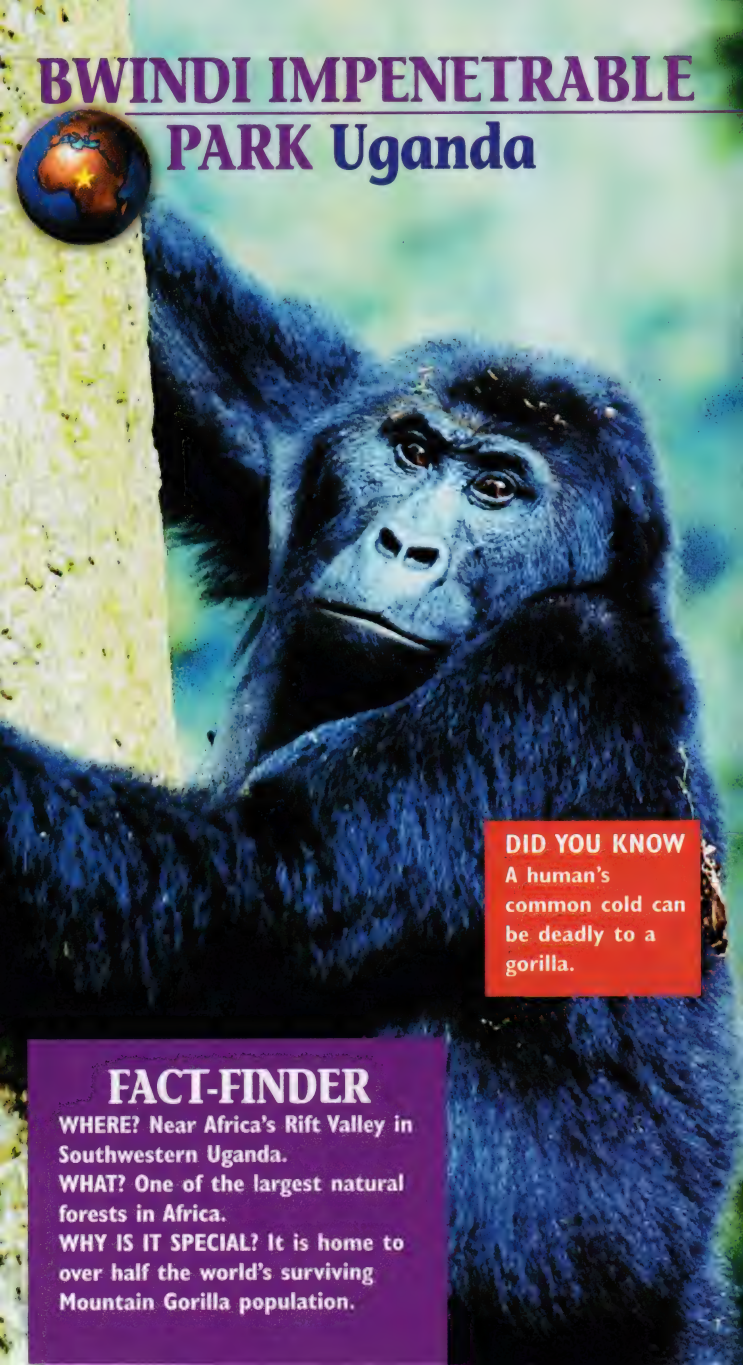
When most people think of Italy, they think of the grandeur of Rome, or the romance of Venice. But nestled high in a hidden mountain range, far away from the bright lights and famous sites, is a precious alpine paradise...the home of Italy's' very first national park.

DID YOU KNOW
Chubby Alpine marmots hibernate for up to six months of the year.

Gran Paradiso, named after the towering peak that dominates its landscape, was formed by shimmering glaciers and gushing streams. Marked by a dazzling mix of multi-coloured larches, pines and firs, the park is home to the rare mountain goat called the ibex.

The wild ibex, one of Gran Paradiso's most famous residents, has been protected from extinction by Italian royalty since 1856.

BWINDI IMPENETRABLE PARK Uganda



DID YOU KNOW
A human's common cold can be deadly to a gorilla.

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? Near Africa's Rift Valley in Southwestern Uganda.
WHAT? One of the largest natural forests in Africa.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? It is home to over half the world's surviving Mountain Gorilla population.

They call it the "Impenetrable Park"—dark, dense and primeval. It is one of Uganda's greatest treasures.

Safely nestled in a remote, East African jungle is a centuries-old sanctuary for one of the world's most beloved creatures: the mountain gorilla.

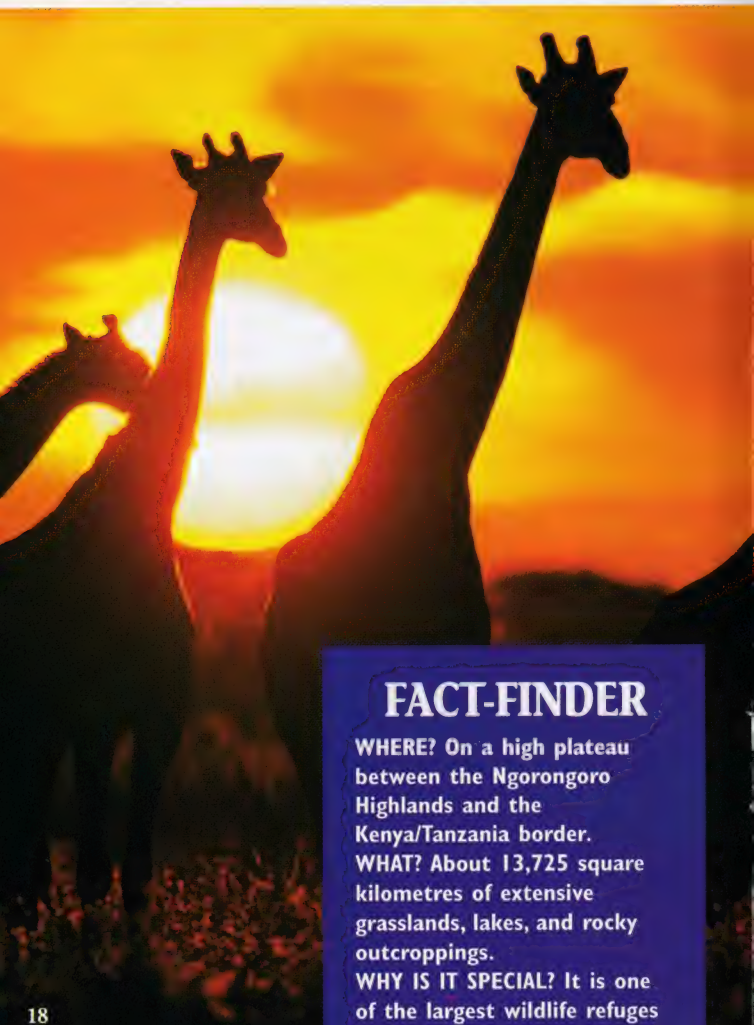
Here, in Bwindi Impenetrable Park, these rare primates are protected from the dangers of the modern world, but they are still in danger of extinction. Today, only 600 Mountain Gorillas remain in the wild.

Bwindi is home to 336 species of birds, 120 species of mammals, and over 200 different kinds of butterflies. From chatty chimpanzees to exotic hornbills, each creature thrives among its lush green forests, ever watchful of gorillas in their midst.

Colourful Hornbills dot the treetops at Bwindi.

SERENGETI
Tanzania

From the sparkling waters of Lake Victoria to the deserted Seronera Valley, Serengeti is home to some of the most graceful, glorious animals on earth.



FACT-FINDER

WHERE? On a high plateau between the Ngorongoro Highlands and the Kenya/Tanzania border.
WHAT? About 13,725 square kilometres of extensive grasslands, lakes, and rocky outcroppings.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? It is one of the largest wildlife refuges in the world.

Three distinct habitats sustain a breathtaking variety of wildlife from multi-tonne elephants to graceful giraffes.

The Masai people call it the "endless plain—Serengeti—over 13,000 square kilometres of rolling plains and hillsides, tucked away in a sundrenched corner of East Africa.

Its vast grasslands sustain a myriad of life, from herds of antelope and wildebeest to playful zebras and gazelles. There are endless parades of elephants, monkeys and giraffes, baboons and hippos basking in the midday sun, and buffalo and impala roaming freely on windswept plains.

In the rocky outcroppings, called kopies, prides of lions keep a watchful eye on the proceedings, waiting to pounce and prove once more why they are the lord of the beasts.

DID YOU KNOW

Lion prides consist of related females—sisters, daughters, aunts and cousins. If mum's not around, an aunt or cousin will nurse a hungry cub.

GREAT BARRIER REEF
Australia

Shimmering turquoise seas team with an abundance of exotic life—both above and below the water.

Giant Sea Turtles can reach upwards of 225 kilograms and live for over 70 years!

It is the largest structure ever created by living things...a breathtaking kaleidoscope of colour that stretches along 2,000 kilometres of Australian coastline.

DID YOU KNOW
Human sweat can be harmful to the reef eco-system.

Over 600 islands and more than 400 types of coral make up the Great Barrier Reef. Yet for all its sturdy appearance, the reef is a delicate and fragile thing. Merely touching it can harm it.

Along the reef a dazzling array of exotic fish and bizarre creatures swim in crystal-clear turquoise waters, divers search for shipwrecks, swimmers bask on white sand beaches, and nature paints an endless palette of breathtaking shades on its shores.

FACT-FINDER

WHERE? 130 kilometres off the coast of Northeast Australia.
WHAT? Over 600 islands and over 310,000 square kilometres of glowing, growing reef.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? It is the most extensive reef system and the biggest living "thing" on earth.

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS
Ecuador

A haven for some of the most unique species on Earth—remarkable creatures who have developed with no predators or fears of man.

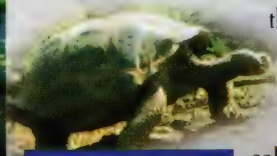
FACT-FINDER

WHERE? About 965 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean.
WHAT? A group of 19 remote volcanic islands.
WHY IS IT SPECIAL? It's home to the planet's most intriguing wildlife, much of it found nowhere else on Earth.

Descended from the dinosaur? Prehistoric iguanas are just one of the rare creatures to be found on this astonishing island chain.

Ten million years ago, raging volcanoes erupted near the equator, creating an eerie realm known today as the Galapagos Islands...a place pirates once called "enchanted."

It was here that the naturalist Charles Darwin came, and created the science of evolution. In this rugged island chain, you can swim with penguins, snorkel with sea lions, and be amused by Blue-Footed Booby Birds. Two of the world's largest reptiles: the prehistoric land iguana and the giant, 180 kilogram tortoise (that gave the islands their name) can be found only here. The abundance of life, the brightly coloured species found only on these odd islands, make this out-of-this-world paradise a rare and special place.



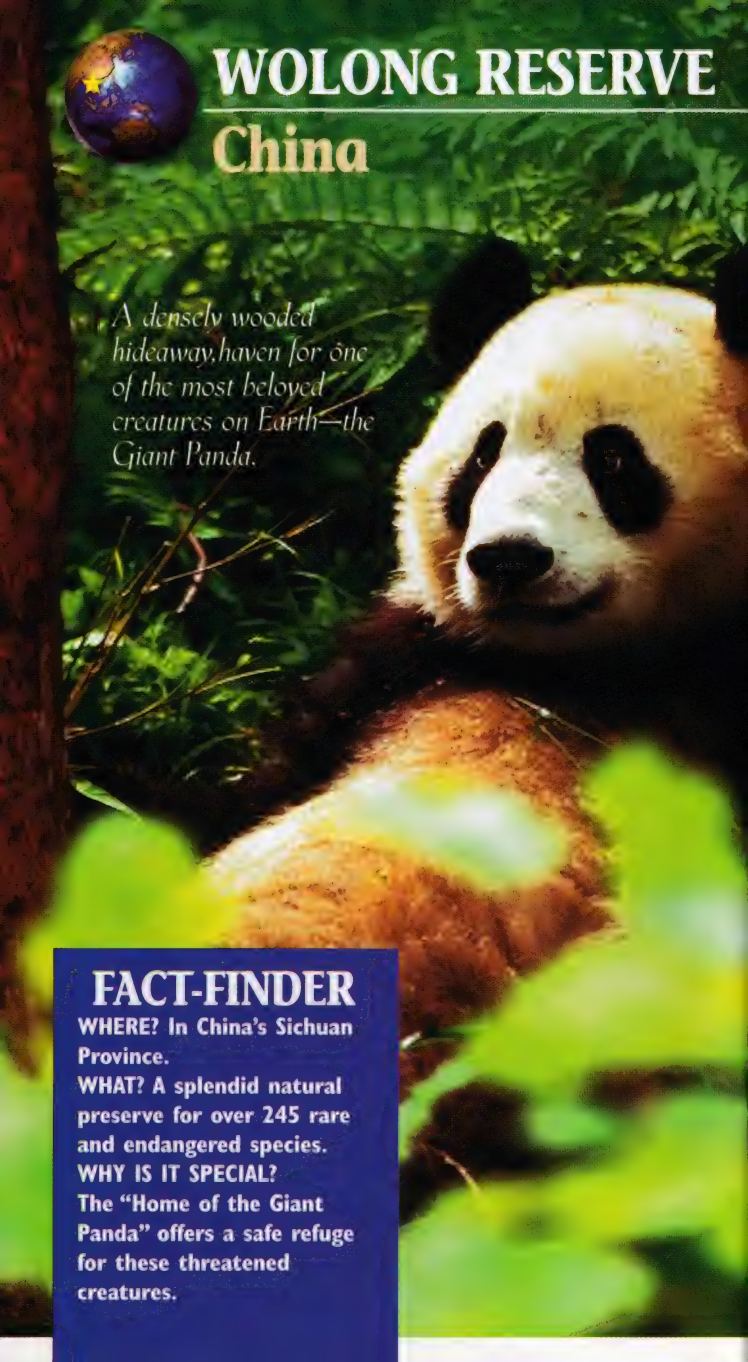
DID YOU KNOW
Galapagos Turtles live up to 100 years!

Brilliant azure feet are the colourful mark of the Blue-Footed Booby.

WOLONG RESERVE

China

A densely wooded hideaway, haven for one of the most beloved creatures on Earth—the Giant Panda.



FACT-FINDER

WHERE? In China's Sichuan Province.

WHAT? A splendid natural preserve for over 245 rare and endangered species.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL? The "Home of the Giant Panda" offers a safe refuge for these threatened creatures.

The unmistakable black and white marks of the Giant Panda have made it one of the world's most captivating creatures. But this adorable bear is not as small as you might think. In fact, giant pandas can grow up to 2 metres long and weigh up to 160 kilograms! Yet at birth, newborns weigh an astonishing 140 grams—about the size of a chipmunk!

China's Wolong Nature Reserve, also known as "The Home of the Giant Panda," has been protecting this rare and endangered species since 1963. And today, with fewer than 2,000 pandas left in the wild, Wolong is a much needed sanctuary—a 2,000 square kilometre park which boasts more than 4,000 different kinds of plants, including bamboo, the mainstay of the panda's diet.

Thousands of years ago, giant pandas were plentiful in China, feeding on a diet of arrow and umbrella bamboo. But environmental changes and expanding human populations have seriously reduced the area in which these bamboo species, and therefore pandas, can live. Wolong's great bamboo forests are the Giant Pandas last hope for survival.

DID YOU KNOW Another kind of panda lives in Wolong—the Red Panda. Scientists believe they might be distant relatives of the racoon family!

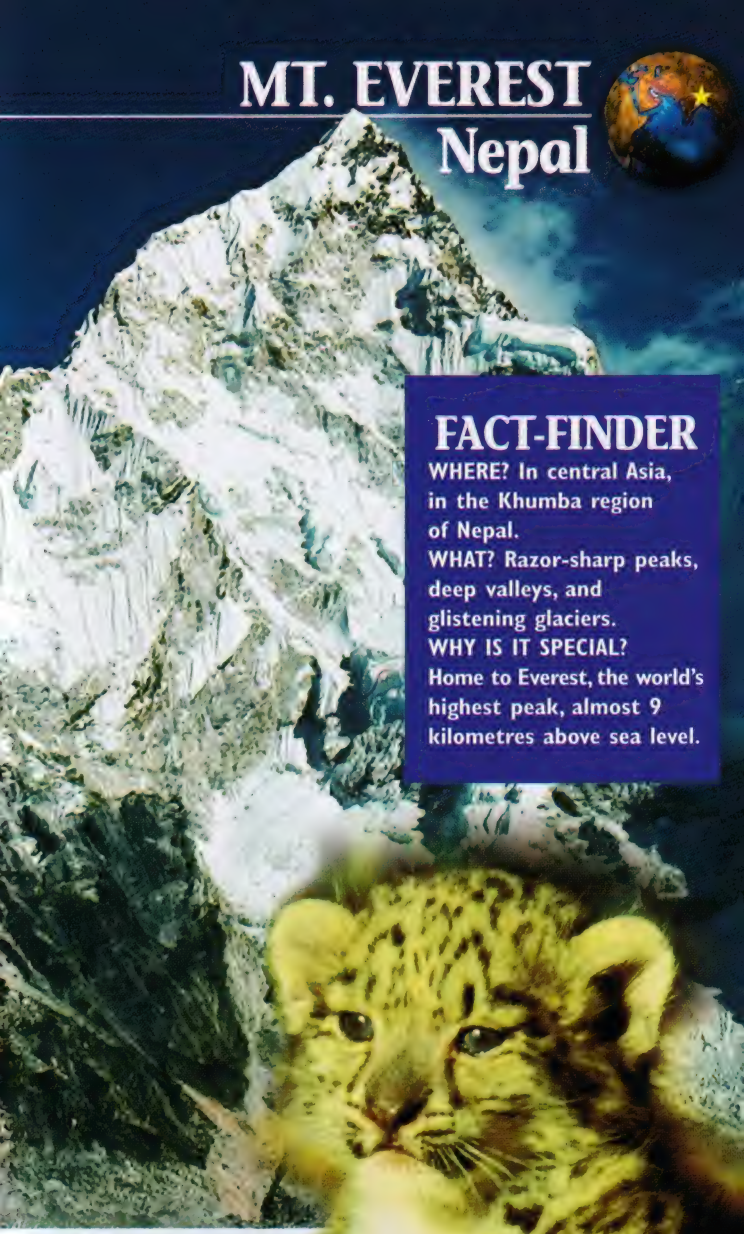
Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain, was named after the British surveyor Sir George Everest. But for the Sherpa peoples, who call Everest home, the peak is known as Sagarmatha—Goddess of the Sky. Sagarmatha is also the name of the world's highest wildlife sanctuary, a soaring paradise of breathtaking scope and beauty located in Nepal.

DID YOU KNOW
Many of the world's most beautiful rhododendron's are native to Nepal?

Enchanted forests of hemlock, fir and juniper shelter rare Himalayan animals like the snow leopard and musk deer. And a dazzling array of brilliantly hued rhododendron and vividly coloured pheasants make this park a true national treasure.

Scale Everest, the highest point on our planet, and stand at the rooftop of the world.

MT. EVEREST
Nepal



FACT-FINDER

WHERE? In central Asia, in the Khumba region of Nepal.

WHAT? Razor-sharp peaks, deep valleys, and glistening glaciers.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL? Home to Everest, the world's highest peak, almost 9 kilometres above sea level.

Precious little snow leopard cubs frolic on the Himalayan hillsides.

1 Glacier Bay
2 Corcovado
3 Banff Canada
GREAT NATIONAL PARKS OF THE WORLD
7 Bwindi Impenetrable
8 Serengeti
9 Great Barrier Reef

4 Grand Canyon
5 Giant's Causeway
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10 Galapagos Islands
11 Wolong Reserve
12 Mount Everest

Violent volcanic eruptions. Torrents of ice and rock. Raging rivers. Without the oftimes destructive forces of nature, we would have no national parks.

The Galapagos were born in a cataclysmic volcanic upheaval which literally pushed the islands up from the sea floor. The Grand Canyon was eroded by silty, sediment-rich waters of the Colourado River which "sandpapered" the rock walls away. In Alaska, glaciers, fast-flowing rivers of ice and rock, carved the landscape into undulating gorges and deep bays. Banff's startling turquoise lakes owe their bright hues to steaming subterranean sulfur pools and the Giant's Causeway was sculpted by volcanic heat tamed by cooling water.

In an ironic twist, nature's rage has given us so much natural beauty!

FORCES
that shaped the parks

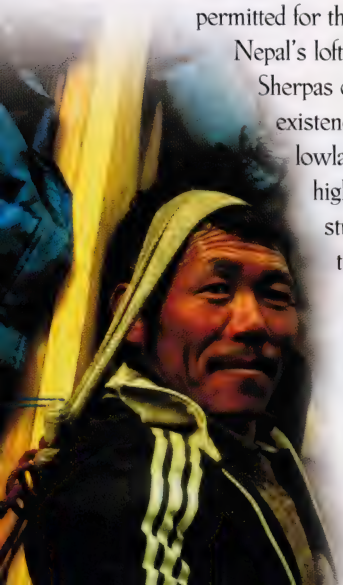
Fire and ice...wind and water—these are some of the forces that sculpted the world's most magnificent sanctuaries.

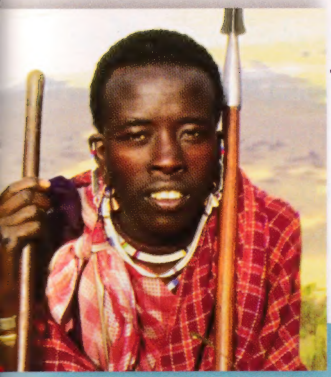
DID YOU KNOW Many of Alaska's glaciers are retreating. Some blame global warming, others say its simply nature's way.

From the Havasupai who live in the shadows of the Grand Canyon to sturdy Sherpas that effortlessly scale the rock face of Everest, many of the most beautiful parklands are also homelands for some of the most fascinating folks on Earth.

Deep within the heart of the Grand Canyon, the Havasupai people inhabit a remote and beautiful corner, in a village called Supai. Their village is accessible only by foot, pack animal or by river, yet many happily make the trip for a chance to share a rich heritage.

Up in Alaska's Glacier Bay, special provisions have been made to allow the native Inuit peoples to live and hunt on these protected lands. Even whale-hunting, which is strictly forbidden—is permitted for their survival. In Nepal's lofty heights, native Sherpas carve out a tenuous existence, farming the lowlands of the world's highest peaks with sturdy yaks. And on the broad plains of the Serengeti, Masai farmers tend to flocks of cattle, goat and sheep as they have for two centuries.





AT HOME in the parks

Home not only to rare and endangered wildlife—the world's parks also sustain many native groups.

Proud faces, beautiful places. Inuits (below) thrive in Alaska's frigid cold and a Masai shepherd tends to his flock in Serengeti's enervating heat.

The National Parks of the World are truly the treasures of our planet. It is our hope that we can preserve their pristine beauty and splendours for generations to come...to ensure that these magnificent sanctuaries endure...for all time.

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